



From the August 30, 2002 print edition

→ [More Print Edition Stories](#)

San Jose airport testing security device that reads palms

Robert Mullins

Updating its security measures, Mineta San Jose International Airport is testing a handprint reader system for its employees.

The San Jose-run airport is one of four airports in the western United States that will be testing the handprint reader from Recognition Systems Inc. of Campbell. Although it will not be used to screen passengers, it will be used by employees to gain authorized access to secure parts of the airport.

Mineta International has installed the \$1,595 reader at a door to one of its offices in Terminal C. Already airport employees carry identification cards that they press against a card reader to unlock doors.

At this particular door, they will use their card to activate the hand reader. They will then place their right palm on the device, which will identify them by their handprint, before they are let inside.

The hand readers analyze more than 90 unique measurements of the size and shape of a person's hand, then compare those measurements to the image of that hand already stored on the device's memory, says Martin Huddart, general manager of Recognition Systems, a division of security giant Ingersoll-Rand Co. Ltd., of Hamilton, Bermuda.

Mineta International will do an open-ended test of the device, says Curt Eikerman, airport operations superintendent, meaning the airport will use the device as long as it wants to and decide whether to add more handprint readers throughout the facility.

Other airports trying out the hand readers include those in Portland, Ore., Boise, Idaho, and Salt Lake City. Airports already using Recognition Systems technology include Ben Gurion International Airport in Tel Aviv, Israel, and San Francisco International. Ben Gurion airport uses hand readers to identify passengers getting off planes.

There are 180 doors at the San Francisco airport now secured by handprint readers.

"San Francisco International is the only airport in the world that has biometrically secured their entire airfield, and they have been doing it for 10 years," says Bill Spence, director of marketing for Recognition Systems.

"Now we kind of have a second wave [of airport interest in biometrics], of which San Jose is now taking a leadership role."

Biometrics refers to identifying a person based on unique biological characteristics, such as retinal patterns, fingerprints, voice or handwriting.

Local government officials hope to make Mineta International a showcase of new airport security practices post-Sept. 11. An aviation security task force co-chaired by Mayor Ron Gonzales and U.S. Rep. Mike Honda (D-San Jose) recently suggested reforms in airport security. The task force hopes to win federal funding for airport improvements at Mineta International, whose namesake is U.S. Transportation Secretary Norman Mineta.

The federal Aviation Security Act, enacted in November last year in the aftermath of the terrorist attacks, mandates improvements in airport security. But it doesn't mandate what type of security measures airports must use, says Mr. Huddart.

A number of companies have come forward in the last year to develop and market some kind of airport security technology, many employing biometrics.

Biometric security had been a popular area for venture capital funding since Sept. 11, but that interest has recently waned, says Mr. Huddart.

"There was a big infusion of money chasing the security market but some of the frenzy has died down," he says.

Although the need for improved airport security remains, it takes time for new regulations to be developed and implemented by airports, he says.

Robert Mullins is a member of the Business Journal's technology team.

© 2002 American City Business Journals Inc.

All contents of this site ©American City Business Journals Inc. All rights reserved.